

APOSTOLIC LETTER

***PATRIS CORDE***

**OF THE HOLY FATHER  
FRANCIS**

ON THE 150<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE PROCLAMATION OF SAINT JOSEPH  
AS PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

**Meeting 3**

*4. An accepting father*

Joseph accepted Mary unconditionally. He trusted in the angel's words. "The nobility of Joseph's heart is such that what he learned from the law he made dependent on charity. Today, in our world where psychological, verbal and physical violence towards women is so evident, Joseph appears as the figure of a respectful and sensitive man. Even though he does not understand the bigger picture, he makes a decision to protect Mary's good name, her dignity and her life. In his hesitation about how best to act, God helped him by enlightening his judgment".<sup>[18]</sup>

Often in life, things happen whose meaning we do not understand. Our first reaction is frequently one of disappointment and rebellion. Joseph set aside his own ideas in order to accept the course of events and, mysterious as they seemed, to embrace them, take responsibility for them and make them part of his own history. Unless we are reconciled with our own history, we will be unable to take a single step forward, for we will always remain hostage to our expectations and the disappointments that follow.

The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that *explains*, but *accepts*. Only as a result of this acceptance, this reconciliation, can we begin to glimpse a broader history, a deeper meaning. We can almost hear an echo of the impassioned reply of Job to his wife, who had urged him to rebel against the evil he endured: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (*Job* 2:10).

Joseph is certainly not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments.

Jesus' appearance in our midst is a gift from the Father, which makes it possible for each of us to be reconciled to the flesh of our own history, even when we fail to understand it completely.

Just as God told Joseph: "Son of David, do not be afraid!" (*Mt* 1:20), so he seems to tell us: "Do not be afraid!" We need to set aside all anger and disappointment, and to embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage. In this way, we become open to a deeper meaning. Our lives can be miraculously reborn if we find the courage to live them in accordance with the Gospel. It does not matter if everything seems to have gone wrong or some things can no longer be fixed. God can make flowers spring up from stony ground. Even if our heart condemns us, "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (*1 Jn* 3:20).

Here, once again, we encounter that Christian realism which rejects nothing that exists. Reality, in its mysterious and irreducible complexity, is the bearer of existential meaning, with all its lights and shadows. Thus, the Apostle Paul can say: "We know that all things work together for good, for those who love God" (*Rom* 8:28). To which Saint Augustine adds, "even that which is called evil (*etiam illud quod malum dicitur*)".<sup>[19]</sup> In this greater perspective, faith gives meaning to every event, however happy or sad.

Nor should we ever think that believing means finding facile and comforting solutions. The faith Christ taught us is what we see in Saint Joseph. He did not look for shortcuts, but confronted reality with open eyes and accepted personal responsibility for it.

Joseph's attitude encourages us to accept and welcome others as they are, without exception, and to show special concern for the weak, for God chooses what is weak (cf. *1 Cor* 1:27). He is the "Father of orphans and protector of widows" (*Pss* 68:6), who commands us to love the stranger in our midst.<sup>[20]</sup> I like to think that it was from Saint Joseph that Jesus drew inspiration for the parable of the prodigal son and the merciful father (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32).

### 5. *A creatively courageous father*

If the first stage of all true interior healing is to accept our personal history and embrace even the things in life that we did not choose, we must now add another important element: creative courage. This emerges especially in the way we deal with difficulties. In the face of difficulty, we can either give up and walk away, or somehow engage with it. At times, difficulties bring out resources we did not even think we had.

As we read the infancy narratives, we may often wonder why God did not act in a more direct and clear way. Yet God acts through events and people. Joseph was the man chosen by God to guide the beginnings of the history of redemption. He was the true "miracle" by which God saves the child and his mother. God acted by trusting in Joseph's creative courage. Arriving in Bethlehem and finding no lodging where Mary could give birth, Joseph took a stable and, as best he could, turned it into a welcoming home for the Son of God come into the world (cf. *Lk* 2:6-7). Faced with imminent danger from Herod, who wanted to kill the child, Joseph was warned once again in a dream to protect the child, and rose in the middle of the night to prepare the flight into Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-14).

A superficial reading of these stories can often give the impression that the world is at the mercy of the strong and mighty, but the "good news" of the Gospel consists in showing that, for all the arrogance and violence of worldly powers, God always finds a way to carry out his saving plan. So too, our lives may at times seem to be at the mercy of the powerful, but the Gospel shows us what counts. God always finds a way to save us, provided we show the same creative courage as the carpenter of Nazareth, who was able to turn a problem into a possibility by trusting always in divine providence.

If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves.

That kind of creative courage was shown by the friends of the paralytic, who lowered him from the roof in order to bring him to Jesus (cf. *Lk* 5:17-26). Difficulties did not stand in the way of those friends' boldness and persistence. They were convinced that Jesus could heal the man, and "finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'" (vv. 19-20). Jesus recognized the creative faith with which they sought to bring their sick friend to him.

The Gospel does not tell us how long Mary, Joseph and the child remained in Egypt. Yet they certainly needed to eat, to find a home and employment. It does not take much imagination to fill in those details. The Holy Family had to face concrete problems like every other family, like so many of our migrant brothers and sisters who, today too, risk their lives to escape misfortune and hunger. In this regard, I consider Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.

At the end of every account in which Joseph plays a role, the Gospel tells us that he gets up, takes the child and his mother, and does what God commanded him (cf. *Mt* 1:24; 2:14.21). Indeed, Jesus and Mary his Mother are the most precious treasure of our faith.<sup>[21]</sup>

In the divine plan of salvation, the Son is inseparable from his Mother, from Mary, who “advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son until she stood at the cross”.<sup>[22]</sup>

We should always consider whether we ourselves are protecting Jesus and Mary, for they are also mysteriously entrusted to our own responsibility, care and safekeeping. The Son of the Almighty came into our world in a state of great vulnerability. He needed to be defended, protected, cared for and raised by Joseph. God trusted Joseph, as did Mary, who found in him someone who would not only save her life, but would always provide for her and her child. In this sense, Saint Joseph could not be other than the Guardian of the Church, for the Church is the continuation of the Body of Christ in history, even as Mary’s motherhood is reflected in the motherhood of the Church.<sup>[23]</sup> In his continued protection of the Church, Joseph continues to protect *the child and his mother*, and we too, by our love for the Church, continue to love *the child and his mother*.

That child would go on to say: “As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Consequently, every poor, needy, suffering or dying person, every stranger, every prisoner, every infirm person is “the child” whom Joseph continues to protect. For this reason, Saint Joseph is invoked as protector of the unfortunate, the needy, exiles, the afflicted, the poor and the dying. Consequently, the Church cannot fail to show a special love for the least of our brothers and sisters, for Jesus showed a particular concern for them and personally identified with them. From Saint Joseph, we must learn that same care and responsibility. We must learn to love the child and his mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities is always *the child and his mother*.

### Questions:

1. *“Just as God told Joseph: “Son of David, do not be afraid!” (Mt 1:20), so he seems to tell us: “Do not be afraid!”* **What fears do we have today and how could St Joseph’s example help us to overcome our fears?**
2. *“ The spiritual path that Joseph traces for us is not one that explains, but accepts. If at times God seems not to help us, surely this does not mean that we have been abandoned, but instead are being trusted to plan, to be creative, and to find solutions ourselves. ”* **Do you have any examples from your life that you can share to support this statement?**
3. *Pope Francis considers Saint Joseph the special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution and poverty.*  **What can we do more as a parish to support those who are in need or persecuted?**

### Special intentions:

- For those who are persecuted for their Faith
- For all the refugees who needed to leave their country due to war, hatred or poverty
- For all politicians and decision makers so that they could find a solution to the current refugee and migrant crises
- For the homeless and for those who are seeking for homes/ houses

## Appendix

### Prayer to St Joseph ( After each session)

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,  
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
To you God entrusted his only Son;  
in you Mary placed her trust;  
with you Christ became man.*

*Blessed Joseph, to us too,  
show yourself a father  
and guide us in the path of life.  
Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage,  
and defend us from every evil. Amen.*

[1] *Lk 4:22; Jn 6:42; cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3.*

[2] S. RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-71), 194.

[3] Cf. *Address to ACLI on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph the Worker* (1 May 1955): AAS 47 (1955), 406.

[4] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989): AAS 82 (1990), 5-34.

[5] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1014.

[6] *Meditation in the Time of Pandemic* (27 March 2020): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 March 2020, p. 10.

[7] *In Matthaeum Homiliae*, V, 3: PG 57, 58.

[8] *Homily* (19 March 1966): *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IV (1966), 110.

[9] Cf. *Autobiography*, 6, 6-8.

[10] Every day, for over forty years, following Lauds I have recited a prayer to Saint Joseph taken from a nineteenth-century French prayer book of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary. It expresses devotion and trust, and even poses a certain challenge to Saint Joseph: "Glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph, whose power makes the impossible possible, come to my aid in these times of anguish and difficulty. Take under your protection the serious and troubling situations that I commend to you, that they may have a happy outcome. My beloved father, all my trust is in you. Let it not be said that I invoked you in vain, and since you can do everything with Jesus and Mary, show me that your goodness is as great as your power. Amen."

[11] Cf. *Deut 4:31; Ps 69:16; 78:38; 86:5; 111:4; 116:5; Jer 31:20.*

[12] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 88, 288: AAS 105 (2013), 1057, 1136-1137.

[13] Cf. *Gen 20:3; 28:12; 31:11.24; 40:8; 41:1-32; Num 12:6; 1 Sam 3:3-10; Dan 2, 4; Job 33:15.*

- [14] In such cases, provisions were made even for stoning (cf. *Deut* 22:20-21).
- [15] Cf. *Lev* 12:1-8; *Ex* 13:2.
- [16] Cf. *Mt* 26:39; *Mk* 14:36; *Lk* 22:42.
- [17] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* (15 August 1989), 8: AAS 82 (1990), 14.
- [18] *Homily at Mass and Beatifications, Villavicencio, Colombia* (8 September 2017): AAS 109 (2017), 1061.
- [19] *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, 3.11: PL 40, 236.
- [20] Cf. *Deut* 10:19; *Ex* 22:20-22; *Lk* 10:29-37.
- [21] Cf. S. RITUUM CONGREGATIO, *Quemadmodum Deus* (8 December 1870): ASS 6 (1870-1871), 193; BLESSED PIUS IX, Apostolic Letter *Inclytum Patriarcham* (7 July 1871): I.c., 324-327.
- [22] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 58.
- [23] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 963-970.
- [24] Original edition: *Cień Ojca*, Warsaw, 1977.
- [25] Cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, 7-8: AAS 82 (1990), 12-16.
- [26] Cf. *Gen* 18:23-32.
- [27] Cf. *Ex* 17:8-13; 32:30-35.
- [28] SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 42.
- [29] Cf. *1 Cor* 11:1; *Phil* 3:17; *1 Thess* 1:6.
- [30] *Confessions*, VIII, 11, 27: PL 32, 761; X, 27, 38: PL 32, 795.